

THE TIME OF THE END

by Ray C. Stedman

Though the title of this study is the *Time of The End*, I want to assure you this has no relationship to the present state of the earthquake situation in California. There are predictions of great earthquakes in the Bible and some of them will be tremendous, but none of them, to my knowledge, specify California. Some of you are breathing much easier that we have made it through April. There are a great many people still holding their breath waiting for the great earthquake, but of course those who hold their breath long enough will not have to worry about it anyhow.

Setting aside earthquake predictions let us turn to the great prophecy given to Daniel by the angel Gabriel, contained in the eleventh chapter of the book of Daniel. This is a long chapter, and you will have to roll up your sleeves and pitch in with me as we look at it together. We shall not read it all, but will try to grasp the full import of this amazing section. It is a remarkable passage. As I pointed out before, Chapters 10, 11, and 12 are all one great vision. Up to that point in Daniel the chapter divisions represent separate prophetic foresights, but the last three chapters are one great vision. It would be ideal if we could take them all at once, for the chapter divisions only confuse the issue. But to take them at once is impossible for it would be attempting one chapter of seventy-nine verses! So we shall observe the chapter divisions if you will understand that it is one great vision we are considering.

The background of this vision is Chapter 10, where we are told that Daniel was allowed to see behind the scenes in the ministry of prayer. The curtain was dropped and he suddenly saw a most shattering, dazzling sight, the Lord Jesus in the fullness of his majesty and glory, the very same One whom John describes in the opening verses of Revelation. It is the same one who arrested Paul on the road to Damascus and who appeared in light that was brighter than the sun. You can imagine the effect of all this upon the prophet Daniel. He is drained of energy and falls on his face to the ground. But an angel is sent to help him and to give him the most detailed vision of the events of human history before they occur that is contained in the Bible.

The angel begins to unfold, in Chapter 11, the history of the future from Daniel's day on. The chapter falls into four rather unequal parts. The first part includes Verses 2-4. In these verses we have the immediate future from Daniel's day on, covering approximately ninety-five years. The angel said to Daniel,

"And now I will show you the truth. Behold three more kings shall arise in Persia; and a fourth shall be far richer than all of them; and when he has become strong through his riches he shall stir up all against the kingdom of Greece. Then a mighty king shall arise who shall rule with great dominion and do according to his will. And when he has arisen his kingdom shall be broken and divided toward the four winds of heaven but not to his posterity not according to the dominion with which he ruled; for his kingdom shall be plucked up and go to others besides these." {Dan 11:2-4 RSV}

Did you recognize any of the historic personalities that are predicted there? Daniel is told that there will be three more kings following Cyrus, the king of Media-Persia at the time the prophet writes. These three are known to history. The first one was Cambyses, the son of Cyrus. He was overthrown by a usurper who took the name of Cambyses' son, Smerdis, and is called in history Pseudo-Smerdis (false-Smerdis). Then the third king was Darius Hystaspes. Any of you who have studied ancient Persian history will recognize this name immediately. Then a fourth king was to follow. That did not mean that he would be the last of the kings of Persia but it meant he was to be the fourth one from Daniel's day, and he would be an especially notable one.

This was Xerxes the Great, king of Persia, who was indeed fabulously rich as the prophet was told, and became strong through his riches, stirring up the kingdom of Greece. It was the raids which the Persians made against the Greeks under Xerxes which inflamed Greece and created an immediate response to the call of Alexander the Great for war against the Persians. The "mighty king" which was to arise is clearly identifiable

as Alexander the Great, the young man who became first king of Macedon and then king of Greece, and finally led the Grecian armies against the Persian empire, overthrew the might of Persia, and swept on to conquer the then known civilized world. According to the prophecy here he was to be "broken." Alexander died when he was only thirty-three years old, and his kingdom was divided but not to his posterity. He had an unborn son at the time of his death who, when he was born, did briefly inherit the kingdom of Alexander. Ultimately the empire was divided among his four generals, according to what is said here, it would be "divided towards the four winds of heaven." It is also stated that "it would be plucked up and go to others besides these." This is the first hint we have of the coming in of the Romans from the West. They are the "others" who got a part of Alexander's empire when it was divided.

The next division of the vision encompasses Verses 5-20. We shall not read these, though if you are interested in this part of history it would be fascinating to trace these events through. In this section beginning with Verse 5, the angel traces the course of two empires, one to the south and one to the north of Israel. The king of the south is Egypt under Ptolemy, who was one of the generals of Alexander, and his successors. The king of the north is Syria. That domain was under the rule of the Seleucids (Seleucus was another of the generals under Alexander). These two kingdoms, Egypt and Syria, fought back and forth over the course of about 130 years. Poor Israel was caught in between the two, and became the battlefield of these armies as they moved back and forth. Jerusalem was captured by both sides from time to time through the conflict and was sacked and ravaged a number of times -- ground like wheat between two millstones.

The account of these kingdoms is given to us because of Israel's involvement. God's primary concern is for Israel and for her sake he gives us this marvelously detailed account which history has confirmed in every detail. It would be really fascinating, if we had the time, to see how remarkably history records the fulfillment of every single prediction here, but we must move on.

Coming to the third section, from {Verses} 21-35 we find the career of a single king the king of the north, whose name was Antiochus Epiphanes. We have met him before in the book of Daniel. He is the "little horn" of Chapter 8, who persecuted Israel and ultimately set up the first "abomination of desolation" in the temple at Jerusalem. He is called "the Antichrist of the Old Testament," a most despicable character, and yet a remarkable man in many ways. He reigned from 175 to 164 B.C. There are certain highlights of this section to which I will call your attention because they have real bearing on our own day. The opening verses, 21 through 28, are the story of how this treacherous man came to power, gaining influence through flattery. He launched a campaign against Egypt, which he won and thus established his power more thoroughly. Then, in Verses 29-30, a very interesting thing is recorded:

"At the time appointed he shall return and come into the south [i.e., Egypt]; but it shall not be this time as it as it was before." {Dan 11:29 RSV}

Antiochus made a second invasion of Egypt but this time he met with difficulty.

"For ships of Kittim shall come against him, and he shall be afraid and withdraw, and shall turn back and be enraged and take action against the holy covenant." {Dan 11:30a RSV}

We know from history how this occurred, Antiochus Epiphanes (he called himself Epiphanes which means "The Illustrious One, The Magnificent One" -- it was his own appraisal of himself -- but his courtiers called him Antiochus Epimanes, the Madman). He led his army into Egypt, but this time the Egyptians had sent for help from the Romans. The Roman Senate sent a general named Popilius, who led a legion against Antiochus. They arrived in Roman galleys which are referred to here as "ships of Kittim." Popilius insisted that Antiochus return to his own land, keep the peace, and acknowledge the authority of Rome. Antiochus asked for time to consider these terms, but Popilius drew a circle around him with his sword and told him to decide before he stepped out of that circle. So Antiochus gave in and agreed to keep the peace, but returned to Jerusalem to take out his spite on the Jews. Instead of keeping peace, he did what is recorded in verse 31.

"Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the continual burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes

desolate." {Dan 11:31 RSV}

Antiochus went up to Jerusalem, entered the temple, and, as we have learned before, erected there a pagan altar. He offered a pig, an unclean animal to the Jews, upon the altar, taking the broth of the pig and sprinkled it around the sanctuary, thus defiling it. Then he set up a statue of Jupiter and insisted that the temple be dedicated to that pagan god. This is what is called "the abomination that makes desolate." All this is extremely important because it was a preview of another abomination of desolation that is yet to come.

In Verses 32-35 we have the career of a very remarkable people described, a people known to history as the Maccabees. They were the sons of an old man named Mattathias, who rebelled against the desecrations of Antiochus and led a revolt against the authority of the king. His sons were successful in this revolt and finally recaptured the temple, cleansed the sanctuary, and restored the Jewish offerings. If any of you are at all acquainted with the history of the Jews you know that this is an important event in their calendar. They celebrate it at the same time that we celebrate Christmas, because the temple was cleansed on December 25, 164 B.C. Here is the description of the Maccabees in the prophecy.

"He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant; but the people who know their God shall stand and take action. And those among the people who are wise shall make many understand, though they shall fall by sword and name, by captivity and plunder, for some days. When they fall, they shall receive a little help. And many shall join themselves to them with flattery; and some of those who are wise shall fall, to refine and to cleanse them and to make them white, until the time of the end, for it is yet for the time appointed." {Dan 11:32-35 RSV}

This remarkable section of the prophecy predicts the rise of a people who would know their God, would do exploits, and who are strong. Though they receive a little help they are ultimately overcome. The Maccabees had to appeal to the Romans for help and it was this appeal which was ultimately responsible for the fact that the Roman government was in control of Palestine at the time our Lord was born. But they did great things, were a godly people, and did succeed in cleansing the sanctuary and restoring the offerings of the Jews. As predicted they did mighty things in the name of God against tremendous persecution, "falling by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder, for some days."

Now notice the last words of Verse 35. They seem to suggest a leap of time that will carry us from these days in the past, to the "last days," to the time in the future when this shall again be fulfilled in a greater way. It shall be "until the time of the end, for it is yet for the time appointed," we are told. Then, beginning with Verse 36, we have the last section of this chapter. There we have a clear picture of the false prophet, the false Messiah, who is accepted by the Jews as a Messiah and who erects the abomination of desolation for the last and final time in a temple that is yet to be rebuilt in the city of Jerusalem.

But before we leave this section on Antiochus Epiphanes, let me point out that many Bible scholars (and I feel there is great justification for this) regard this whole section, from Verse 21 on, as a preview to be repeated in the last days. These same events would be fulfilled in a larger and greater way than in the past. This is very significant, for if it is true then it indicates that the present relationship between Egypt and Syria in the Middle East must be broken and these two countries shall become enemies again instead of allies as they are now. If you have been watching the events of the Middle East of the last few years you know that these two nations are drawing apart from each other. They once were one nation, the United Arab Republic. But that did not last long, and they have since been drawing further apart. They are united only by their antipathy toward Israel, but they disagree in their views as to how warfare against Israel should be carried forward. According to this prediction, it will ultimately result in these two nations becoming enemies once again. We shall watch that scene with great interest.

Let us look at Verses 36-45. The first section of it gives us the character of the last king of the north, the final one who appears as the false prophet and who erects in the temple, as we have seen before, an image of the Western political leader, the first beast of Revelation 13, which will be the ultimate abomination of desolation. To confirm the fact that the passage is dealing with the last days, look at the first verse of Chapter 12, remembering that this is all one great vision. The prophet there is told,

"At that time [the time of the events of the closing part of Chapter 11] shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time." {Dan 12:1a RSV}

That "time of trouble" is clearly the great tribulation which our Lord mentions in Matthew 24. So there is no question about the fact that we are dealing with the last days. Also in Chapter 12, notice Verse 11, which says,

"And from the time that the continual burnt offering is taken away, and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days." {Dan 12:11 RSV}

That is referring to the last desecration of the temple that is to occur, but the only reference to it in this vision is clear back in Chapter 11, Verse 31, which describes the desecration under Antiochus Epiphanes,

"Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the continual burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate." {Dan 11:31 RSV}

That is why many scholars feel that this whole section, from Verse 21 on, is to be repeated in the last days.

Now let us look at this last great personality.

"And the king shall do according to his will; he shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods. He shall prosper till the indignation is accomplished; for what is determined shall be done. He shall give no heed to the gods of his fathers, or to the one beloved by women; he shall not give heed to any other god, for he shall magnify himself above all. He shall honor the god of fortresses instead of these; a god whom his fathers did not know he shall honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. He shall deal with the strongest fortresses by the help of a foreign god; those who acknowledge him he shall magnify with honor. He shall make them rulers over many and shall divide the land for a price." {Dan 11:36-39 RSV}

There are several very important things to note:

First, this king blasphemes God. That is always the mark of the Antichrist. Also he magnifies himself. In Chapter 8 we learned that he does this "in his own mind," he does not do it openly, and we will see the reason for that in a moment.

Then we are told "he shall prosper till the indignation is accomplished." The "indignation" is another term for the great tribulation. It indicates this man is going to have power over the whole Middle East and perhaps over much of the world in conjunction with the great Western ruler during the whole time of Daniel's seventieth week, and especially through the last half of it, the time of the great tribulation. "He shall prosper till the indignation is accomplished."

Then we learn he shall rule by military power. That is what is meant by, "He shall honor the god fortresses" and, though he himself is primarily a religious leader, he shall have a great military power backing him. Revelation 13 shows us that this military power is the leader of the Western world, the Roman Empire restored, which will be dominant in these last days. The Syrian king shall be in league with a foreign god and this foreign god is the Western leader, the first beast of Revelation 13, whom he will cause the whole world to worship. The dominant religion of the world in that day will be the worship of man, exemplified in one man, who will be the great Antichrist of the last days. But this man, this king of Daniel 11:36, is the one who will lead the world in the worship of that Western leader.

"He shall be in league with a foreign god, and shall divide the land for a price." That latter phrase suggests the possibility that here is the one who will finally settle the quarrel of Jew and Arab over ownership of the land of

Israel. Someone must come ultimately to settle this great difficulty, because it is now dividing the Middle East, and much of the world. Until the problem is settled there can be no hope for any kind of peace in the Middle East. But there is coming a man who will succeed for awhile in bringing peace to this area, and this is the man who is before us now.

The action of the last days is recorded in the closing section.

"At the time of the end [that places it at the beginning of the great tribulation, the middle of Daniel's seventieth week] the king of the south shall attack him [Egypt shall come against him]; but the king of the north [the king we have just been considering] shall rush upon him like a whirlwind, with chariots and horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall come into countries and shall overflow and pass through. He shall come into the glorious land [Israel]. And tens of thousands shall fall, but these shall be delivered out of his hand: Edom and Moab and the main part of the Ammonites [the present territory, largely, of Jordan]. He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape. He shall become ruler of the treasures of gold and of silver, and all the precious things of Egypt; and the Libyans and the Ethiopians shall follow in his train [he is in North Africa, now]. But tidings from the east and the north shall alarm him, and he shall go forth with great fury to exterminate and utterly destroy many. And he shall pitch his palatial tents between the sea and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end with none to help him." {Dan 11:40-45 RSV}

What a remarkable account! Here we have traced the final conflict, which is called, in the book of Revelation, the campaign of Armageddon. You have heard about Armageddon, and here is the record of a great part of it. We learn that it begins with an attack against Syria from Egypt, the king of the south attacking the king of the north. Their ancient enmity is restored and Israel once again becomes a convenient battlefield for them. Undoubtedly this attack occurs because Syria has made a covenant with the Jews, and this angers the Egyptians. Because Syria has made a covenant with the Jews to allow the restoration of Jewish worship in the temple at Jerusalem, the Egyptians attack. But the king of the north shall strike back, and shall "rush upon like a whirlwind, with chariots and horseman, and with many ships." Many Bible scholars feel that this suggests strongly that he has at his disposal far greater forces than would be possible for the small country of Syria. They link with Syria the power of Soviet Russia. As you know, Russia has a very strong hand in that area at this present time and is backing Syria in rearming against the Jews.

We are next told that he conquers Egypt and North Africa. The king of the north comes down through Palestine, perhaps at this time erects the abomination of desolation in the temple, and then moves down into Egypt, conquering Egypt and North Africa. But while he is in North Africa he hears troubling tidings from the east and the north (this would be from the direction of Israel, and Syria).

Here we can find possible place for a cryptic word found in the book of Revelation, which speaks of a great Eastern army (the kings of the sunrising, literally), who come as a tremendous force, of two hundred million men against Israel in the last days.

If you were the king of the north and you were down in Egypt with an extended supply line and heard of a force of two hundred million men coming to cut that line of supply, you would be troubled too, would you not?

Because of this threat, he quickly arouses his forces and goes forth "with great fury to exterminate and utterly destroy many." He comes back into the land of Israel, pitches his tent between the sea (the Mediterranean sea), and the glorious holy mountain (Jerusalem), and "there he shall come to his end with none to help him." We have that end described for us in the book of Revelation. It will be by the sudden appearing of Jesus Christ with the armies of heaven, to take the beast and the false prophet here, overcome them, and cast them into the lake of fire.

This is a difficult passage in Daniel 11 and one that many Bible scholars have wrestled with and struggled over. In some ways it is difficult to relate to its context, but in other ways it is very simple, very plain. But it

does indicate certain definite things. It does confirm what the New Testament tells us, that the lawless one and his cohorts shall be brought to an end by the appearing of Jesus Christ again in power and great glory. As we have seen all through Daniel, the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.

I want to say a few things in closing:

These predictive passages are not given to us to frighten us. They are not given to move us to go out and dig bomb shelters and hide in the ground, or sell our property and get white robes and go up on the mountain top.

They are given to guide us, primarily, in order that we may not be part of the international delusion of the last days, or that which leads up to the last days. That delusion is the worship of man. That is the final ultimate delusion. Humanism, the philosophy that man is able to be his own god and does not need another, is the final, terrible lie of the devil that will sweep through the world. Increasingly we find men moving in that direction. Increasingly the propaganda mills are turning out more and more powerful propaganda to suggest to people that there is no God, that God is dead, that God is of no use to men -- has no interest in them even if he does exist -- and that man does not need him anyhow for he is his own god: Man can do anything he wants. We are getting this in increasing degree today.

These prophetic passages are given for five practical reasons:

- First, they are given in order that we might have a realistic view of man and of the panaceas man attempts to solve his problems. We need to understand from Scripture that nothing is going to work, ultimately. Though this does not mean that we are to give up efforts to find good programs to help alleviate some of the misery of human beings, yet we are to understand that these will never really solve the problem. They are at best temporary alleviations and will not finally solve anything. That means we ought not to get so wrapped up and involved with political movements of the day that we feel they will be the final answer, and that the world will never survive unless it gets on the bandwagon of such-and-such a proposition.
- Second, we ought to learn from these passages to employ spiritual weapons rather than pressure tactics in the solution of human problems. I am amazed at how long it seems to take many Christians to learn that real, earnest, concerted believing prayer is a million times more effective in changing a situation than moving into a building, sitting in protest or demonstrating in the streets. The fact that we do not employ spiritual weapons indicates that we do not believe what our Lord has told us. If we really believed in the spiritual weapons (love, righteousness, truth, faith, etc.), we would employ these far more than other types of tactics and political maneuvers.
- Third, these passages ought to teach us to view persons as more important than programs. God is not interested in programs, ultimately. Certainly you cannot live life without programs, but it is not the program that is the important thing. It is the people interested in them. The whole testimony of the scriptures is to this end. God is interested in people. Programs come and go, movements in history appear and disappear, rise and fall. God seems to care little about those things. But he is very, very concerned about the people involved in them. Therefore, as we see the events of our own day we ought to view persons as far more important than programs, and the establishing of warm relationships as being of far greater value to us than making money. This is a great area of failure in many Christian homes. Time spent in learning to know your children, and letting your children know you, is of far greater value than earning enough money to buy a color TV set, or a higher priced car, or a cabin in the mountains. Let us get our value systems straight. That is what these passages are given to us for, that we might realize that what is happening in our home circle, between parents and children, and with our neighbors and friends around, is of far more importance and requires much more of the investment of time than advancing a material standard of life.
- Fourth, these passages ought to teach us to manifest a spirit of trust and confidence in God, and to display that in spite of the worsening conditions in which we live. Jesus said this specifically: "When you see these things begin to pass ..." Then what? Go grovel in the earth, and look sad and forlorn? Act as though the world is coming to an end with no hope left? No. "Lift up your heads and rejoice" {cf, Luke 21:28} for it is working out exactly as God said it would. It ought to confirm your faith, not destroy it. It is coming to pass exactly as he said.

- Fifth, these passages ought to help us build deep ties of love and consideration with other Christians. "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, and so much more as you see the day approaching," {cf, Heb 10:25}. Do not separate yourself from other Christians. Do not go off on your own but get with them, get to know them, spend enough time together that you can know one another. Love one another and pray for one another. I am not simply talking about coming to church on Sunday. That is a very important factor because that is where we are taught the truth. but that is not where we are to live our Christian life. We do that in the home and in the neighborhood.

There are five suggestions that occur to me as we draw to a close in this study of Daniel. I hope that they will move us to practice and not mere profession. Prophecy is not given to us to satisfy our curiosity, but to move us in right and proper ways.

Prayer:

Our Father, we give thanks for this word of truth which the angel gave to the prophet Daniel, so long ago. It is absolutely amazing to us that after all these hundreds of years since then these events are now being fulfilled, and not one word or one syllable needs to be changed in these ancient prophecies. Surely this ought to make us realize that we have to do with the God of history, the God who is utterly faithful, with whom is no shadow of turning. So, Lord, we pray that you will strengthen our faith. Increase our love and devotion, our openness and fairness and honesty, as we ought to live in these days. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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